3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

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10. Young musicians

[facing page 49]

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

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11. Young musicians

[342]

[facing page 64]

FAMILY LIFE FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

In the dry season which was the dancing season children from three and four years upwards spent hours watching the older boys and girls dancing. On the edge of the main group small boys particularly would with intense solemnity and exaggerated movements practise steps and postures, singing meanwhile. The Ngoni used no drums and no musical instruments in their dancing, and despised the users of drums. All their rhythm and synchrony was achieved by perfect unison of action and voice. The little boys practising solo on the edge of a dance-group listened intently every now and then to get the rhythm correctly, shifted their feet and stamped with the rest.

The little girls were collected together by older girls now and then, and sometimes joined by the boys, to play games of catch and various miming games such as choosing a lover, hen and chickens, slave-raiding, baboons in the maize gardens. These were accompanied by songs in which the leader, or 'owner', of the game sang the story and the rest joined in the refrains. Many of these miming games called for alertness and co-operation, and the slow and solitary were soon shown up and laughed at. Another set of songs with refrains were ballads or stories without action, and these were listened to by the hour by the younger children towards the end of the day, especially if the singer of the ballad was a lively narrator.

Girl children of this age-group spent a lot of their time watching adults and older girls doing their household work. In time they learned to imitate the actions of pounding and grinding, using a small pole or a stone, of sweeping with a frayed-out stalk, of winnowing or sieving with a little basket, or ladling food with a tiny wooden spoon. When they went to the gardens with their mother, they were given a small branch to carry home on their heads for the fire. Later the little girls had a tiny pot put on their head, perched on a miniature grass carrying-ring and went to the water-hole with their nurse girl to fill it and carry it home without spilling the water.

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
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All of them made their own axes, knobkerries and catapults for hunting. Some were interested in music and made shepherds' pipes, or one-stringed lyres, or hand pianos of metal strips affixed to a wooden base. They composed their own songs and airs for these instruments. Others showed ingenuity in making elaborate models of lorries and aeroplanes, or in carving heads of animals. Others liked to weave fibre into the wide-brimmed hats some herd-boys wore.

More significant still for their future social relationships, they began now to choose their own intimate friend and to form the friendship pacts which were characteristic of Ngoni society, and regarded by adults as important in the child's development. In the friendship pacts, especially those between boys, there was no implied or manifest restraint. They could have 'joking relations', and hence say outrageous things to each other. They could quarrel and make it up, and defy each other's wishes and decisions, without a final breach. The relationship between friends often lasted into later adult life, and was probably all the stronger for the occasional lapses and outbursts, and by the fact that in the daily companionship of friends the burden of observing 'respect' did not oppress them.

The boys' dormitory

The hut known as the boys' dormitory and the whole system of living which it represented was a traditional feature of Ngoni village life. In their culture it had three main purposes. Formerly, when as they said 'War was our school', it was the place where boys slept and lived together, and where they learned to defend themselves and to obey authority. It was in a sense the preparatory school for the regiment, and the herding of cattle was the basis of the curriculum. Once a boy went to sleep in a dormitory he never left it until he married, unless he was seriously ill. In the days of warfare, he learned in the dormitory and out herding the cattle, a knowledge of the bush and its wild life and of his fellows, and

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
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524 of the riddle. An unexpected reply or a good guess often drew applause, even if it was not the accepted correct answer.

535 857 Before it was dark, all the herd-boys joined in what they called 'drill' on the flat space where they milked the cows in front of the kraal gate. As a rule this 'drill' was practising for the *ngoma* dance which took place after harvest and was the only dance for boys and girls approved by the Ngoni rulers. Sometimes they varied this dance, practising with swift follow-my-leader manœuvres, turning, twisting, lifting sticks, knocking knobkerries together, stamping, whistling. [534] As we have said already, the Ngoni had no drums, and all the precision and rhythm in any dances or concerted movements depended on exact timing and following the leader. The accuracy and precision reached was remarkable, and represented a high degree of intense concentration and co-operation among the dancers or 'drillers', who developed an almost intuitive knowledge of what the leader was going to do next. This dancing was practised in front of the men and older youths on purpose. They criticized it freely, and sometimes, though rarely, praised the boys. More often they came forward to show them how to do it better.

233 857 For the greater part of the day the herd-boys were with the cattle. They rose before it was light, undid the kraal gate, and as dawn broke led the cattle to the river. Then they went to the grazing grounds which according to the season were near or far from the village. As the dry season advanced and the grass became poorer, they had to go farther afield to find grazing. They returned to the village about ten o'clock [234] and milked the cows and took the milk in gourds to the senior women, keeping some as their own perquisite. The cattle were driven under some trees to rest during the heat of the day, and taken to the grazing ground again about two and brought back about five, watered and put in the kraal and the gate was closed. Variations in this time-table depended on the seasons, the quality of the pasture, and on whether the herd-boys went to school or not.

476 having finished their task, and going off to wash in the river
342 with more whistling and singing.

Specialized crafts

463 Ngoni elders said that in old days there were no specialists in the villages, except the iron workers who were mostly captured people, and that all men knew how to work in leather, wood, and fibres. By the time schools had been established
[177] and a variety of careers lay open to boys, it was rare to find ex-schoolboys taking up village crafts with a view to making a cash income from them. A few did, however, and their choice of a craft was attributed either to wishing to work with a relative, or to an inborn skill and liking for the craft.
281 Tanning skins was one such craft, scraping them, rubbing
[411] in ashes and stretching them on frames. Cutting shields from skins and interlacing the front with different coloured skins was considered a highly skilled job. Making wooden spoons,
322 wooden meat dishes, headrests for pillows, hafts for spears and knives, and sheaths for knives, was carried on in most
[413] Ngoni villages by two or three specialists using small sharp axes. They were assisted by a youth or two who liked the work, showed some aptitude for it and enjoyed sitting by the kraal gate, intent on their job, but missing nothing of what
285 was going on. In remote villages many men made mats and baskets for household use and for sale and paid their taxes from such sales. Every man knew how to make bark rope
283 for binding loads, fastening the grass on roofs, tying up beasts.

● 534 Musical instruments were another specialized craft, inseparable from being a musician and knowing how to perform on them. Small hand pianos of strips of metal on a wooden base, single stringed and several stringed lyres strung over a hollow gourd—these were solo instruments to accompany songs. A boy might all of a sudden decide to make such an instrument and learn how to play it by assiduous practice.

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

539 Place your hand upon her shoulder in the dance.
533 Place your hand up her shoulder whom you love.
This season there is no bow (*i.e.* war).

Oh, oh, oh.
I have come to the wedding.
The porridge they have cooked with the finger.
(It is so badly made.)

Oh belt, belt, belt,
Belt, belt,
Why should I not borrow the belt,
When the dance has sounded?

XXIX

THE CHITOTO DANCE

535 They dance it at a mourning, and even just for
534 fun. They do not have drums, but fasten rattles on their legs.

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539 One perhaps has taken the other,
533 Summoned him for love of him,
And to-day we mourn, love;
Yes, father,
And the cock crows.

Should your neighbour's son not have a wife,
Look after his belly,
His belly,
His belly, wo, ha, ho!
I have sung.

10: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1959
FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

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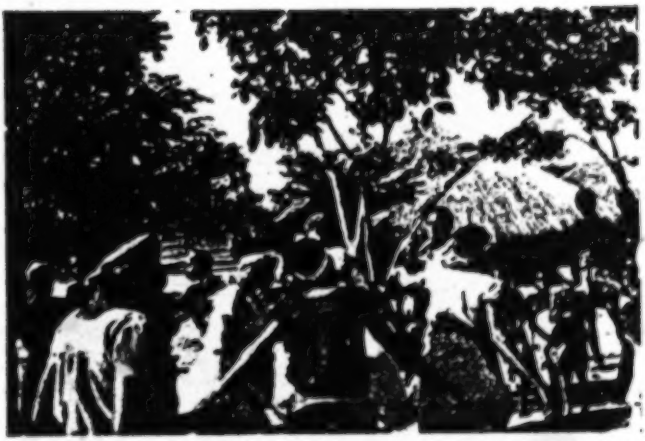

5. Girls dancing *Citelele* in competition with another village. The girl in the centre has a whistle in her mouth

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6. Young man drumming for a *Jimi Roja* dance at an installation ceremony. This dance, named after an American band leader, is allowed only on important occasions

NGONI

[Facing P. 224]

/10 cont'd/

304 tribal mark and a hole made for individual ornamentation. Earrings, 301 beads, and other ear ornaments are worn, including safety pins. 824 Young girls from time to time make black rectangular marks on their 302 cheeks by pressing on to them strips of nkholosa grass. These marks are quite black at first, and gradually lose their colour over a period of a year. Scarification of the face and body is carried out on both men and women for ornament as well as for medication, but there 531 is very little regularity of pattern, save for the inverted crescent 619 mark made between the eyebrows of women. This is the Nsenga tribal mark.

For dancing, most people wear their best clothes, and girls 535 and young women carry whistles on lanyards round their necks. When dancing ngoma, the most important tribal dance, miniature shields are carried, and a special type of knobbed stick that is held aloft. Less frequently seen are the wrist and ankle trappings, and skin garments that used to be associated with this and other regimental dances. Nowadays, women's skirts and frocks are sometimes seen worn by men on such occasions.

534 Single-ended and double-ended drums are used as accompaniments to dancing, while boys play hand pianos. Girls play on a single string fiddle made from a reed. Whistles are bought from the stores. Old fashioned fiddles with gourd resonators are rare.

524 Boys spend much of their time making and playing with toys of various kinds. Animals, men, and motor cars are fashioned out of mud, while more elaborate motor cars are made from mealie stalks. A favourite toy consists of two wheels, up to six inches in diameter, on an axle with a handle some four or five feet long, terminated in another wheel of the same size. This construction, made of straw, representing the elements of a motor car, is pushed along by boys of ages four to ten.

The well-known game, involving four rows of twelve holes, with three stones in each hole, is played by men, usually in holes scooped out in the ground. A favourite game of girls and boys consists of throwing up beans with one hand and catching them again

13:Fraser M-5 (ca. 1890)1901
FR5 Ngoni FR5

888 [222] Yet the position of the old women of the village was a highly honoured one. The mother of the headman was almost more powerful than her son. And we always take good care when we enter a new village to win the kindly favour of the old grandmother first of all. Then we are sure we have found a way to the son's heart. One of the most beautiful things in our tribal life is the honour which is paid to the grey hairs of the village. The bent and helpless old men who lived through the glorious fighting [623] days, and understand all precedent and etiquette are the judges and councillors. And no case can be tried, no decision can be made, until the old men give their presence and their opinion. It is hard when the young are leaping ahead of their fathers through education to maintain this veneration for the elders. Yet it is the very backbone of the tribe. There is nothing more contemptible than an African or an Asiastic with a veneer of education who affects to despise the elders of the village. But I know no more pathetic sight than our afternoon schools where grey-haired men and women may be seen peering through faded eyes trying also to learn to read and keep abreast of the young and alert life, while the sun goes down in their eventide.

333 [181] The Ngoni were first of all a fighting people, and then a pastoral. Their land affords splendid pasture for cattle. And they take great pride in their herds. Round the cattle kraal centre all their ambitions, and highest delights, and best intelligence. They sit and watch the cattle going out in the early morning and coming in in the evening, and know every spot and colour of their beautiful animals. The quietest and most peaceful sight I know is when the sun goes down, and the fierce heat has [534] given place to the welcome cool of the evening. Then you will hear the music of reed pipes, and looking up you see a long line [512] of sleek, solemn cows, with large silken dew laps, and fat humps, slowly coming up the village path lowing for their calves, while boys ride on their backs sitting or standing upright, balancing themselves carefully and blowing on their pipes. Before and behind them runs a troop of goats and sheep bleating with such a human cry. In a moment the village is alive—sheep and goats are chased back and forward till they find the huts where they sleep with their masters. And boys run out with wooden pails [234] into which they milk what the calves have not sucked from their mothers.